

THE ONE TASK OF A FRUITFUL LIFE - GIVING HOSPITALITY TO THE WORD

Matthew 13:8, 23 - "Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty....23....As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Luke 8:15 - "As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience."

There is a wonderful simplicity in the description of the good soil and the seed sown therein. Everyone knows real farming isn't as simple as this. Neither Matthew, Mark, or Luke make any mention of what all farmers do with the soil in the business of farming. There's no mention of proper irrigation, fertilizers, pesticides, etc. The point of the parable is deliberately simple so we don't miss the point in a parade of conditions and technologies. Everything is focused on the one essential thing. The seed must **enter** the soil. Listening can never be a **surface** activity. It can never be a mere interest, hobby, or past-time.

Jesus tells His parable to make us see His point **uncluttered** by any possible distractions. The Word must be heard for what it actually **is**. The Word must be heard as **God's** Word. Many good, church-going people in this sanctuary won't do that this morning. Nothing else matters. If this one thing - this **listening** - is done properly, all will be well.

This point is made even clearer in the strange wording of the parable. We've all heard this story so many times we don't even feel the awkwardness of Jesus' opening words - "**A sower went out to sow....**"(13:3). Jesus deliberately doesn't call this person a **farmer** or even a **laborer**. I mean, there is no **person** called a sower on a farm. Sowing is **one** thing a farmer does - one function among many. But **this** farmer's function is exclusively described in terms of **sowing**. Sowing the seed and receiving the seed. That's all that matters in Jesus' story.

And here's what's precious about that. Jesus labors to make a fruitful Christian life a **simple** thing. I didn't say an **easy** thing. There are battles and struggles to be sure. But deep spiritual life isn't **complicated**. It only has to be **wanted** enough to possess it. But it's never out of reach. And all that has to happen is the **seed** has to go down deep into the **soil**. Period. There are no other procedures or miracles or techniques. The power is carried along in the seed itself.

And Mark makes it unmistakably clear that the **seed** is the **Word** - "**....the sower sows the word**" (Mark 4:14). Get the seed into the soil and the fruit will come. Get the Word **into** a listening heart, and the life of that Word - the fruit - will come **out** of that heart. In this story from the Master Teacher, it's just that simple. He **intends** to tell it that simply.

Our task today is to examine the heart Jesus described as "**good soil**." What happened in **this** heart that didn't happen in the previous three. This is important because, as Jesus tells it, the difference isn't in the **seed**. The difference is in the **soil**. **Matthew's** gospel is full of **warning** and **caution** toward his religious Jewish audience. His fruit numbers go **down**. No one can afford to be careless or indifferent about the Word. **Mark's** rather brisk and joyous account has the fruit numbers going **up**. There is hope for the outcast and the outsider. **Luke** gives no numbers at all. But he **does** include some important details about this fruitful heart that neither Matthew nor Mark mentions.

1) THE FRUITFUL HEART UNDERSTANDS THE WORD

Matthew 13:23 - "As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who **hears the word and understands it**. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

We should take note of this because it is not the first time Jesus specifically highlighted the importance of **understanding** in this parable. In the very first soil - the hard path soil - Jesus talked about the danger of **not** understanding the Word received - **Matthew 13:19** - "**When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.**"

Not understanding the Word isn't an **intellectual** issue. It's not that the Word is in a foreign language or too theologically deep to be comprehended. We know this because Jesus describes this lack of understanding as a kind of **resistance** to the Word - like a **hard-packed soil** that doesn't **yield** to the Word - doesn't **take it into the will**. So **not** understanding the Word isn't an **intellectual** issue. It's a **will** issue and a **love for God** issue.

A non-listening heart is always a **moral** issue with God. Such is the bias of the sinful heart that it can actually become zealously committed to anything **other** than God's revelation in Christ. We start to measure the security and fulfillment of our lives by the **intensity** or the **sincerity** with which we stubbornly cling to our own convictions rather than humbly bowing before the Word.

Paul encountered this in his Jewish audience - **Romans 10:2** - "**I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.**"

There it is. My own **excitement** over my convictions isn't enough to make them true or life-giving. Notice, It's not that these Jews were

left without abundant testimony to Christ. That's not what closed their ears and hearts to the truth. There were prophecies and messages and signs abounding with the truth of Jesus Christ. No. It was their *zeal* - their own inner *desire* - their *wills* stubbornly cemented in their own ways - that kept them from humbly responding to the truth of the Word.

So here's the life lesson - ***It is a terribly blinding condition to refuse to change your ways when the Word speaks to your present condition.*** Something permanently debilitating starts to infect my soul when I fail to give place to the idea that the **Word** isn't just another one of many words. This is **God's** Word and I must instantly **bow my will** before it.

This Word is always a game changer. This Word is life itself, and rejecting it means losing something far more precious than my own way. When Jesus says the pathway soil doesn't **understand** the Word He means it doesn't understand what's at stake. This person doesn't **perceive** his need to **bow and submit** to this Word.

Now we're in a better position to grasp what Jesus means when He tells us about the good soil. This soil - this **heart** - receives the Word with **understanding**. This person sees what's at stake. He will remove any rocks or weeds or thorns because he **understands** the centrality and preciousness of the Word he's received.

Hear Jesus' heart here. Three out of four people who hear the Word don't **get** what's going on. They may be polite. They probably go to church. But three out of four people don't **understand** how much is at stake. Jesus is crying out here for **perception** - an **alertness** to the moment when the Word bumps into your will. You and I simply have nothing else anywhere near as important to attend to. That's the understanding of the good soil. That understanding is where fruitfulness comes from.

From this point, Luke gives three additional descriptions of the good receptive soil. Matthew and Mark don't list them, so we should be grateful to Luke for these details. Luke describes this good heart as **holding the Word fast, being honest and good, and bearing fruit with patience** (Luke 8:15).

2) A FRUITFUL HEART HOLDS THE WORD FAST

Luke 8:15 - "As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, **hold it fast** in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience."

A vague knowledge of the Word is almost useless. Fruitful hearts understand they can't grow holding divine truth with a light grip. They know there is more to listening than **enjoying** the moment. They know the most important things in life are rarely entertaining. They know discipleship doesn't always feel **exciting**. They know most of the people with whom they rub shoulders each day won't **share** the ideas they have come to cherish. They know the entertainment of this world is **easily more absorbed** into their imaginations than the deep truths of God's Word. **Holding fast** to the Word means fruitful listeners are increasingly selective in their listening habits.

What do fruitful people do when they listen to God's Word? They **hold on** to it. They **dig in**. They **replay** the truths they first heard from God's Word so they can keep them alive and warm in their hearts. Fruitful people know the constant tug-of-war in a world that constantly seeks to **take away** the power of Biblical truth once **received**.

We already **know** Jesus said Satan swoops down to take away any shred of Biblical revelation that isn't **fastened down** to our hearts by meditation and application. What do you do to **hold fast** what you hear in church on Sunday? Jesus said that's where the fruit comes from.

3) A FRUITFUL HEART IS AN HONEST AND GOOD HEART

Luke 8:15 - "As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an **honest and good heart**, and bear fruit with patience."

These are strange words. We already know that the Bible says our hearts are **deceitful** and **desperately wicked** - **Jeremiah 17:9** - "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"

So what can Jesus mean here? Is He saying there are some people who just naturally have sinless hearts? I think He's saying something deeper. Jesus is recognizing those people who respond **honestly** to the resistible prompting of a loving Holy Spirit and humbly **admit** their dependence on the truth of the Word getting deep into their hearts. These are **honest, good** people, not because they're sinless, but because they're willing to **receive** from God's grace-filled Word.

The old, Biblical word for what makes these hearts honest and good is **repentance**. They never **tire** of repentance and they never **cease** repenting. The Word constantly produces fruit in their lives, not because of their own good works, but because it constantly gets under the surface of their pride and self-will and personal agendas.

Spiritually wise and fruitful people are those who have come to learn the difference - the *subtle, sneaky* difference - between hearing the Word with *pleasure* and hearing the Word with *decision*. Lots of people measure their hearts by the *enjoyment* they get from listening to the Word, or the worship, or the fellowship. They think something deep has happened because they say, "Wasn't that a good day in God's house?" Or, "Wasn't that a good teaching?" Others have learned that doesn't go quite deep enough. They have learned to *give hospitality to the Word* by constantly *repenting* when it speaks.

4) **A FRUITFUL HEART HEARS THE WORD WITH PATIENCE**

Luke 8:15 - "As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and *bear fruit with patience.*"

We should be eternally grateful for Luke's inclusion of this little phrase from Jesus. There is nothing more discouraging to faith and continuance than the disappointment that arises from others who *don't* respond appropriately to the preciousness of the Word.

This is why we are told *in advance* that many (3 out of 4?) won't share our commitment. We are told many will start and quit. We are told many won't even start. They will show no more interest to the Word than to a cold cup of tea.

Have *patience* in your life in the Word. Give God full attention when no one else seems to. Don't measure the value of the Word in your *own* heart by the poor response it receives from others. Keep the big picture in mind. Always give God the benefit of the doubt in circumstances you can't understand. The unresponsiveness of others is no threat to the authenticity of the Word.

There's promised harvest of fruit. Yes, it takes time to grow - like *all* fruit. But guard your heart. Hear the Word and *hold it fast*. Hear the Word with an *honest and good heart*. That means keep your ears open by keeping your heart repentant. And always hear the Word with *patience*. It might not look like it right now, but there's a harvest coming. Jesus guaranteed it.